



## News Release

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### **When Fido Isn't Friendly**

#### *Data Show Nearly 2,000 Dog Bites a Year in Utah*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – More than 9,500 Utahns were attacked by dogs and hurt seriously enough to need emergency room treatment over a five-year period from 1999 to 2003. Utah Department of Health (UDOH) data show that 53 of those victims were hospitalized for their injuries.

In Utah, young children are the most frequent victims of dog attacks. Utah hospital discharge data from 1999 to 2003 indicate:

- 1,800 dog bite victims were infants and children under the age of five
- 1,754 were children ages 5-9
- 1,667 were ages 10-17

The numbers don't surprise trauma workers at Primary Children's Medical Center (PCMC). "At our hospital we see a child hurt by a dog about every three days," said Kris Hansen, R.N., Trauma Program Manager, PCMC. "In 2004, we saw 105 children in the emergency department for dog attacks and hospitalized six of them."

The problem of dog bites varies across the state, with an average of eight injuries for every 10,000 persons in the population from 1999 to 2003. Counties with the highest rates were Uintah (18.7), Beaver (15.94), and Grand (15.87). The lowest rates were in Summit (2.88), San Juan (3.22) and Emery (5.62) Counties.

The UDOH data have prompted local health departments to take a closer look at the problem of dog bite injuries. "We have begun the process of developing a community-wide dog bite prevention program," said Joseph Shaffer, Director, TriCounty Health Department (Daggett, Duchesne and Uintah Counties). "We plan to involve public safety, education, and the health care community in this process."

National studies show the majority of dog bites (61%) occur in the home or a place familiar to the victim, such as the home of a friend or close relative. Nearly one-third of

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all victims are bitten on the head, face, neck and chest areas. While some breeds of dog may be perceived to be more aggressive, any dog can bite if provoked or threatened.

“You can teach your children to reduce their risk of being attacked by a dog,” said Cyndi Bemis, Education Coordinator, Violence and Injury Prevention Program, UDOH. “The keys are not to chase or tease dogs they know and to avoid dogs they don't know. It's best if parents actively supervise any interaction between young children and dogs.”

The Humane Society of the United States recommends teaching children these important safety tips:

- Never touch a dog before asking the owner's permission. Some animals don't interact well with children, and the owner should know to warn the child.
- Even after getting permission, let the dog see and smell you before petting it.
- Let the animal sniff the back of your hand – with fingers curled under – first.
- Never bother dogs that are eating, sleeping or nursing puppies.
- Never run past a dog. A dog's natural instinct is to chase things that run.
- Don't stare at a dog. Dogs see staring as a threat and they can react aggressively.

If it looks like an animal is about to attack, tell children:

- Don't scream or run.
- Remain motionless with your hands at your sides, and avoid eye contact with the dog.
- If the dog does attack, “feed” it your backpack, jacket, purse, bike or skateboard, or anything you can put between yourself and the dog.
- Once the dog loses interest in you, slowly back away until it is out of sight.
- If you fall or are knocked down, curl into a ball with your hands over your ears and don't scream or roll around.

If a dog does attack, try not to panic:

- Wash the wound with soap and water.
- Call you health care provider for further care if needed.
- Get to an emergency or urgent care center if the wound looks serious.
- Report the bite to law enforcement and give as many details about the dog as possible to help officers track it down.

For more information on dog bite prevention, dog obedience and selecting a dog for your family, visit the Humane Society of the United States at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org).

Utah Dog Bites by County, 1999–2003		
County	Number of Bites	Rate per 10,000 Population
Uintah	240	18.70
Beaver	49	15.94
Grand	68	15.87
Carbon	150	14.87
Kane	42	13.98
Tooele	303	13.71
Sevier	130	13.65
Juab	56	13.25
Iron	216	12.26
Duchesne	89	11.94
Wasatch	95	11.55
Box Elder	209	9.66
Millard	59	9.36
Weber	926	9.24
Sanpete	107	8.96
Garfield	20	8.63
Salt Lake	3,956	8.58
Cache	374	7.96
Piute	5	7.10
Davis	847	6.83
Utah	1,247	6.39
Washington	296	5.98
Morgan	22	5.90
Emery	30	5.62
San Juan	23	3.22
Summit	46	2.88
Daggett	** (** indicates fewer than 5)	—
Rich	0	0
Wayne	0	0
<b>Total:</b>		<b>9,605</b>
		<b>State Average: 8.3</b>

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*